New Fiction

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the cud of reflection. The reader smiles, but not the book. Now and then, at the helpless shaking of your diaphragm, a story will seem to glance at you with that plaintive surprise of the perfect raconteur, "Did I say something funny? I wonder what it could have been!" For somehow on paper there has been produced the illusion of a down drawn upper lip, the hesitant, meditative pull at a short inverted pipe, the musical, drawling voice of Ireland itself; at its kindly best, not brawling or treacherous but just—Irish.

The book is a collection of short stories, some of them connected here and there, but for the most part each a complete episode in itself. There is an arbitrary subdivision into two parts, the first eight stories being devoted to small village life in Ireland at the time of the troublous prelude to its parting with England, yet one may look in vain for the murderous bitterness and phrenetic uproar with which the newspapers have made us warily familiar. Instead, one is left with a general impression of tremendously good intentions that somehow go askew and lead—well, to the usual place. Not always, though; at least not until after the close of the narrative.

Take Lady Bountiful herself, who gives her name to the book. What could be more kindly, ingenuous and ingenious, than her practical application of the Government's scheme by which it hoped to mitigate the evils of unemployment likely to follow demobilization and the closing of the munition works? "An out-of-work benefit of 25 shillings a week struck her as a capital thing . . . for the first time in her life she became slightly interested in politics."

Her method of procedure was simple. In brief, it consisted in hiring and discharging everybody in the village until they all had insurance cards properly stamped and were receiving 25 shillings unemployment pay every week. "Dismissal of servants became a regular feature of life at Castle Affey. On Monday morning Lady Corless went down to the village and dismissed every one she had engaged the week before . . . after three months every man and woman in the village had passed in and out of Sir Tony's service and every one was drawing unemployment pay. . . ."

The second half of the volume is largely concerned with the not wholly moral adventures of one Gorman, a painstaking and conscientious scalawag of an Irish journalist and politician, who strives to please that monarch in exile who for the purposes of fiction is named Konrad Karl II. of Megalia. Other rascals appear in the group before the three stories, "A Bird in Hand, "The Emerald Pendant" and "Settled Out of Court," are done with them. Their point of view in all matters is singularly similar to that of "Arabian Nights" characters. But one likes Gorman just as one likes the Fox in "Æsop," smiling and quiet, letting monkeys and asses play the fool for his advantage.

HIDDEN GOLD. By Wilder Anthony. The Macaulay Company.

THIS spring's styles for the Western novel continue to show the popular ranch material, patterned with cattle and sheep; a plaid mixture of fences torn down with malicious intent and grazing grounds entered by those who have no right in them.

Pouring through a narrow opening in the environing hills, and immediately spreading fanlike over the grass of the valley, were sheep; hundreds, thousands of them . . . like a torrent of dirty, yellow water.

The world of fiction is full of mutton. Thus the warfare of cattle and sheep begins in this story, and is carried on in a manner that has interesting elements in spite of the restrictions under which the author labors. For he conscientiously brings in every thing which the public—or the publisher's idea of the public—has been taught to expect in the way of love interest, heart throbs, villians who get the heroine into their power just so that she can be rescued, in true movie manner, in the nick of time; noble cattle men, wicked politicians who know of treasure on the ranch and try to do the owner out of it, only, of course, to be properly foiled. And there are kidnapings, ambushes, pursuits.

We accept them all as a matter of course—all these things being necessary in this form of the standardization into which American fiction, no longer a fluid thing, is being crystallized; we accept them, like the fourteen lines of the sonnet and their rhyming, and having good naturedly admitted that these are the laws which Western fiction must obey, also admit that it can still be a pretty good story in spite of its obedience. Mr. Anthony tells his story, in spite of these restrictions, attractively.

Aside from the fictional "red blood" there is some in the story that seems quite human. Some of the minor characters, old Bill Santry, in particular, keep a certain solidity in the reader's memory after the rest of the tale has receded into the general limbo of current fiction.

The wide spaces of the Wyoming cattle country when portrayed with so nice a touch and so convincing a manner as that used here, have an interest of their own, and carry off a good deal of cheap melodrama. The book is like a good landscape in which the artist for purely extraneous reasons, has felt obliged to place a few commonplace figures. Possibly the commercial reason is unanswerable. Maybe the public does prefer even conventional figures to landscape work, yet somehow, just for curiosity, one would like to read this story again with all the characters, except Bill Santry, left out. Probably it wouldn't sell, and there wouldn't be much bulk in it, but what was left would be of fine quality.

MUD HOLLOW. By Simon N. Patten. Dorrance.

MARK TWAIN once prepared a choice variety of weather description and put it all together at the end of the book, advising the reader to pick out what he wanted and insert in the narrative as desired. Once there was another book printed with a page or so of punctuation marks—commas, semicolons, &c.—assembled in an appendix, with directions to the fussy reader to stick 'em in wherever he liked. Mr. Patten has refined upon this idea in this curious book, the first part of which is story—"Part I: Its (Mud Hollow's) Life Presented," and the second part of which is a philosophic, psychcanalytic, critical commentary—"Part II: Its Life Interpreted." It is a striking innovation: the hurried reader may stop at the end of Part I, and the thoughtful inquirer may, if he likes, confine himself to Part II. The effect, however, will be much the same upon each procedure, as either lands in a puzzling confusion, lit up, none the less, by some bright spots.

Mr. Patten has a luridly pictorial imagination, and is also capable of pungent remarks, as asides, but it is a little hard to see just what he is really driving at in the book. It seems to be laid upon a foundation of primitive Methodism, intensified by a dash of Calvinism and then covered with a rich top dressing of psychoanalysis of the ultra-Freudian school and a sprouting of blossom in evolutionary theorizing. It is an odd compound of curious interest.

The story part of it deals with the development of a very solid headed young man named Paul, a girl named Ruth, who is an "experiment in education," being allowed, like Topsy, to "jes grow," in her own way, and her father, a professor, who is an apostle of feminism. Paul devotes himself to the "rights of women," though it is impossible to make out what he conceives their wrongs to be, and he is also devoted to chastity, to ascetic renunciation for himself. Ruth, being a human girl, does not wholly sympathize, as she demonstrates in several extraordinary scenes. Paul is eventually a little enlightened, but it comes to no very intelligible conclusion.

The analytical chapters are really more interesting. They deal with such topics as the elements, racial and religious, that went to the making of the American composite, and then switch to a study of "complexes," "genetic psychology," the sense of sin, romantic love, and finally with the "next step in evolution," which appears to be toward an "exit" from our present impossible situation into some kind of new life, the detail of which is wisely left unstated. Mr. Patten is a serious thinker and he has laid hold of the tail of some interestingly wriggly ideas, but is not quite sure enough in his grasp to pull them fully into the light. The method of his presentation is unfortunately chaotic.

PLASTER SAINTS. By Frederic Arnold Kummer. The Macaulay Company.

THE very latest thing in current fiction is the attack upon what is usually called "Puritanism," for short: the wave of repressive legislation and propaganda as manifested in prohibition, vice crusades and certain retrogressive religious revivals. Not, of course, that the theme itself is new. Shakespeare is a good authority for the persistent recrudescence of cakes and ale, in one form or another, and the enduring hotness of ginger. But there is a new pertinency, an aptness to the times, in the treatment of it in such stories as this. Mr. Kummer does pretty well with it, on the whole, though if one must judge the book simply as a work of literary art it cannot be rated above the ordinary level. In fact, some of it is crude, laid on in raw colors—old time poster drawing and chromo-lithographic effects. But though his people are drawn without subtlety there is life in them, and he makes out a very fair case for the moral he is preaching.

The book is no defense of immorality, no apology for excess or obscenity. It is rather a plea for sanity, for toleration, for the defeat of hypocrisy and hard sanctimoniousness. Reform, and a better civilization, he argues, may not be achieved by fiat. When asked what he would do to set the world right the hero of this story replies:

"Education. * * * From the infant all the way up. Teach the child to think right, and the man won't do wrong. That's my idea, but I admit it will take a long time—generations. You can't make the world over in a day." That is sound doctrine, with which few thoughtful readers will disagree.

The story is concerned with a very crusty old multi-millionaire, who is pious, narrow, a model of orthodox philanthropy as embodied in large gifts to the church, foreign missions, &c., bitterly hostile to the theater, which he considers a work of the devil, and of course a prohibitionist. On the other side of him he is a colossal financial grafter, a wholesale profiteer in food products and a manipulator of movements on the Stock Exchange. He is, in short, a familiar conventional figure. So too, is his pious wife. It will surprise no one, however, to find their daughter yearning for emancipation, and a career of her own. The hero is also a convention but rather better done. He is no "plaster saint," and he really oughtn't to have allowed himself to get drunk, even to start the story, but he does pretty well throughout the rest of it. Another older reprobate, Mr. Blair, is the more interesting. He, too, is a millionaire, but has a reputation for naughtiness, not wholly undeserved, but out of proportion to his occasional laxity. He and the hero catch the old curmudgeon in the act of profiteering in sugar and successfully hold him up. And, as might be guessed, the hero and the "emancipated" daughter of the ogre get together happily at the climax. Mr. Kummer adds a touch of the old time melodrama in making his wicked magnate repent and indulge in public confession of his sins. But in spite of its crudity the story is interesting throughout.

THE EIGHT STROKES OF THE CLOCK. By Maurice Le Blanc. The Macaulay Company.

OUR old friend Arsene Lupin calls himself Prince Renine in these latest exploits of his, but it is a thin disguise, a mask hardly more than hooked over one ear and left dangling. The heroine-in-chief is Madame Hortense Daniel, whose worthless husband, insane in the first of the eight episodes, conveniently dies, unregretted and little noticed, somewhere toward the end of the book.

Eight strokes of the clock and eight episodes, each provided with a sub-hero and heroine and a mystery which could easily have been made to serve for a full length novel, but which Prince Arsene-Lupin-Renine disposes of with Gallic crispness.

To many readers it may serve as an inciting invitation to the book to call attention to the absence here of the common variety of young heroine, the cheap "love interest," the general "grippingness" that mark the American and much of the English equivalent of this kind of story. This may actually be read with entertainment by grown ups, folk who are as much as thirty years old or even more, without being annoyed by the conventional intrusive heroine. When will publishers learn that we have played with a doll until the sawdust has all run away and left it flat?

And why—oh, why!—can't the artist who draws a picture for a frontispiece and a jacket of such a book be incited or allowed to read the story before he begins to draw? For it should be a telescope, not a dinky pair of opera glasses that the gentleman who kneels before the open case of the grandfather's clock should be offering to the lady in riding breeches—riding breeches that didn't come into fashion until years after the date of the story. For, says the writer, "These adventures were told to me in the old days by Arsene Lupin," and Arsene Lupin has been detecting for, well—a very long time, certainly, as heroes of fiction go.

A telescope then, not opera glasses. (Never mind the breeches.) But the telescope has to fit a groove in a loophole of a parapet, and obviously you can't fit a tiny pair of glasses into any such situation. It is what the lady and the gentleman see through it after it is fitted there that serves as an introduction to the other exhilirating horrors on which the reader is to sup. Eight of them—each complete in itself, yet carrying forward to the next, like the courses of a well planned dinner. It is a delectable entertainment. The excellent translation is by the late Alexander Teixeira de Mattos.

THE LOVE CHASE. By Felix Grendon. Small, Maynard & Co.

MR. GRENDON had an excellent idea in the conception of this book. In the experiences of a young woman raised in the "narrow, intolerant atmosphere of Brooklyn" (Park Slope, too!) when she escapes into the more violently agitated air of the "Outlaw Circle" of the model tenement district of Kips Bay. He might have made a telling story of it if he had been able to cut it down to considerably less than half its present bulk, and work it out on more coherent dramatic lines. Even as it is, Janet is a fairly human girl, a type not very rare nowadays, and worthy of more study. The circle of youth and near-youth into which she drops is also real enough; another manifestation of our brummagem bohemianism. It is a section that has not hitherto received much notice either from the novelists or newspaper humorists, though it has been known to the sophisticated for some time. We are told by the analytically minded hero:

"Janet is utterly different from the Lorillard Outlaw girl, or the Greenwich Village bohemian girl. The effect of Greenwich Villageism is to make irregularity (what regularity so often is) a bore. The purpose of Lorillardism is to make irregularity pay. But Janet is not likely to adopt a radical creed merely as a pose or with an eye to profit. She will adopt it in a spirit of sheer blind self-sacrifice."

Naturally when she does there is more or less trouble, through a long, very intricate and sometimes inconsequential plot, but to the necessary happy ending. Although the theme deals with assorted varieties of free love, "varietism" in extramarital affairs, &c., it is not a repulsive or salacious performance, and Mr. Grendon means well, is sincere in his beliefs, though not wholly successful in presenting them in concrete dramatic form.

THE YELLOW POPPY. By D. K. Broster. Robert M. McBride & Co.

THERE appears to be something of a swing of the pendulum of popularity—if the publishers are guessing correctly—toward the somewhat old fashioned historical romance; a harking back to Dumas in the adventure tale rather than more voyaging in a mere fairyland of modern strenuosities. It is at least more dignified, and in competent hands may yield better results than the fancifully staged affair. Mr. Broster is no Dumas; neither, as to that, is any other modern experimenter in the field. But he is a competent workman, and this is a soundly built, well planned and skillfully executed romance. It is possibly a little longer than need have been; but once started there is never any good reason why such a narrative should stop until the writer is tired, as there is always room for a "continued in our next"—witness what Stevenson has called the finest tale of them all, "The Vicomte de Bragellone."

Mr. Broster takes us back to 1799, "or, if you prefer it, Floreal of the

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